



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, 14th October 2025 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Jubair Ahmed (JAh)
- Judith Albert (JAl)
- Dr Charmagne Barnes (CBa)
- Mariangel Briceno Riverol (MBR)
- Cynthia Bryan (CBr)
- Furqan Miah (FM)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Muhatasim Sadat Nibir (MSN)
- Bob Walder (BW)

In attendance:

- Phillip Dowler, *Director of Advocacy and Opportunities, HSU (PD)*
- Rhiannon Ellis, *Academic Experience Manager, HSU (RE)* in part
- Sean Ferrie, *Director of Operations, HSU (SF)*
- Samy Gibson, *Marketing Manager, HSU (SG)* in part
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU (RH)*
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU (KM)*
- Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU (LP)*

1. Welcome

BW opened the meeting and welcomed Trustees to today's discussions.

2. Apologies for absence

- Hauwa Jijwa
- Rajiv Sudan

Non-Attendance

None

3. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

4. Minutes of previous meetings

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meetings held on 26th June 2025 and 18th September 2025

Signed Dated

5. CEO update

The Board received an update from RH who highlighted the following:

- The Start of Term programme was very positive indeed. Overall, over 4,000 students attended alcohol-free events, with sightseeing trips proving to be very popular, and just under 2,000 students attending Forum events. The Cultural Carnival was a particular surprise success of the week, with over 400 attendees. RH sincerely thanked JA and the Officer team for their support in attending almost all events.
- 'WTF is Herts SU?' was a new awareness and engagement campaign launched in October. This was a massive success with just under 4,000 students engaging with various activities and pop-up events. It was designed to demystify the SU and strengthen visibility across the student body. The pop-up Advice Centre was a notable highlight, with the team speaking to hundreds of students across the week. This will certainly shape thinking about outreach work going forward. UM asked how these engagements translated into longer term engagement and visibility. RH replied that this forms part of a wider Marketing campaign with the Comms team now reaching out to students to showcase and highlight what the SU can offer them. She went on to say that she saw this as very much integral to the overall Marketing strategy.
- The 2024-25 Year-End Audit went very well, and the final Audit report will be presented at the next meeting of the Board of Trustees in November. The year-end surplus is currently being reported at £11,831 (subject to Senior Partner review). RH thanked LP and her team for the smooth running of the Audit.
- The Office for Students (OfS) have launched a consultation on proposed changes to the regulation and standards in higher education. HSU is contributing to UH's institutional response and will also submit their own response to the consultation. From HSU's perspective, of particular concern is Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement, which sets out changes on students' contribution to TEF assessments, and what size and shape this submission should take.

6. September Management Accounts and Commercial Finances

LP reported that the Auditors have asked HSU to change the way restricted funds are reported ie monies that come from UH for Herts Unfiltered and SCOs. These funds will no longer be shown in the Accounts as Income and Expenditure, but rather Expenditure.

For September, LP noted a positive overall position, with all departments effectively managing expenditure, which can be difficult at the start of the academic year. Year-to-date performance remains on track, although there are a few phasing issues. Central costs appear higher due to additional spending on part time Officers in September to increase engagement. Research currently shows a negative position as costs have been accrued for Herts Unfiltered but are yet to be claimed. This will balance out in January. Within Finance and HR, some insurance costs have been incurred, and funds are pending reimbursement. Overall, the year-to-date position remains healthy.

4.20 pm FM joined the meeting.

SF noted that phasing variance, which has now evened out over August and September, was due to the purchase of the marquee for Freshers' Fair. There is currently a £5k year to date underspend,

supported by income from the Careers Team, who hired the marquee the day before the Fair. Commercial performance was particularly strong, showing a £24k surplus, £36k ahead of budget. Key drivers included wristband sales which maxed out at 550 – higher than anticipated and very popular. The wristband covered all Freshers and all Wednesday events for the year, helping to maintain vibrancy on campus and encourage ongoing student engagement and spend. Average attendance across events was around 800 students. Bar sales were £9k ahead of budget, reflecting a noticeable trend of students being more 'outgoing' and sociable in their behaviours compared to recent years, returning to pre-pandemic social habits and spending more on events and alcohol. RH noted that this positive shift had also been seen across campus and JAh added, by way of example, that more students were now restarting Societies - many of them new and unique - than in recent years.

Private hire income was also strong, £8k ahead of budget, partly due to additional bar spend, that had not been anticipated, from graduation events. SF noted a good start to the term overall, with expectations that engagement levels will dip slightly before picking up for Halloween and the Christmas period. The team's efforts will continue to focus on the experiential to maintain momentum and engagement.

BW thanked LP and SF for their insightful updates and congratulated them and their teams on the very positive financial landscape.

7. University update

CBa updated the Board on the current opportunities and challenges facing UH:

- Start of Term. CBa said she was very pleased to hear that Start of Term had gone well for students as a whole. Some timetabling issues, more than likely the result of increased student numbers, were picked up by the UH team, as well as JAh, and these were resolved very quickly. Issues ranged from students going into classes where they were not part of the cohort to the late choosing of modules on some courses. She thanked JAh for highlighting the issue.
- TEF. The Office for Students have launched the first consultation on the TEF to review underlying principles, with a second consultation starting in Autumn 2026. The revised framework will introduce an integrated quality system, looking at student experience alongside student outcomes, with the weighting between the two yet to be confirmed. The familiar ratings of Gold, Silver, Bronze and Requires Improvement remain, although Bronze will now be seen as the minimum acceptable standard. Both student experience and student outcomes will be assessed at these levels, with the overall rating determined by the lowest of the two. The further down the ratings a university is, the more frequently it will be reassessed, and it may face possibly penalties, including a cap on student numbers. The first cycle of assessments, planned to start in 2027-28, will focus on undergraduate provision; the second cycle will commence in 2028 and beyond for postgraduate and modular provision. The format of the student submission is under discussion, with ongoing debate across the sector about how best to draw student representatives to achieve depth without losing breadth. CBa highlighted that the student submission is only required for the student experience element, and both she and RH said that they did not agree with this, arguing that student outcomes are an important part of understanding the student experience. CBa asked RH to circulate the consultation to Trustees who should direct any queries or input to RH and/or JAh. CBa noted the collaborative and partnership approach to work in this area.

RH

- SCOs. CBa recently met with all the new SCOs to discuss key topics such as the Student School Forums, Herts Unfiltered, the programme level check, and the different ways students have voice for their academic studies, amongst others. She plans to meet with them again in advance of the NSS and PTES in January. CBa emphasised the very positive impact that students can have over their peers to drive progress and positive change.
- Semester C. This is progressing well, **subject to UH receiving its CAS allocation** ????. Semester C will run across both College Lane and DeHav because the Business School have too many students to accommodate all of them at College Lane. Planning is about ensuring that students have an equitable experience.
- VC. VCE has been renamed University Executive Team (UET). The VC has asked CBa to consider the campus infrastructure in the light of the increase in commuting students, particularly following her concerns about attracting the undergraduate population back to campus. CBr asked if it was possible to have an acronym list/briefing sheet to better familiarise herself with the university's organisation and structure.

RH

8. Elected Officer report

The Board received the Elected Officer report from JAh. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- JAh noted that he had now finalised his Action Plan for the academic year. He thanked RH for her leadership and support in assisting him.
- UM asked if there were key milestones or timeframes allocated to allow the Board to better monitor progress and status of Officer projects. JAh replied that since the last Board Meeting, Action Plans have been finalised, and university services have been reviewed to identify opportunities that would benefit from Officer involvement, including identifying key individuals with whom to liaise. Understanding the student perspective on better value for money is also underway for Semester A, with a view to decision-making for Semester B. This will form part of Herts Unfiltered insight, and JAh noted that he had been in touch with students to check that that the volume of questions for this was not overwhelming. BW reported on his recent discussions with RH about putting guidelines into place for the Elected Officer team to assist them in being effective in their role, and how to most effectively feed back to the Board. He said he would be looking to other Trustees to feed into these conversations. CBa seconded UM, noting that plans only become real if you can see the impact, and that a timeline is so necessary to avoid this kind of important work getting lost in the hurly-burly of the academic year.
- CBa went on to thank JAh and noted how much the work of the team aligned with issues coming out of the NSS.

SG joined the meeting at 5.05 pm.

9. Marketing update

The Board received a review from Samy Gibson, Marketing Manager, HSU, on recent Marketing initiatives centred around Start of Term, along with associated impacts. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- UM thanked SG and commended the recent initiatives. He asked for more detail about the use of LinkedIn as a platform for students. SG replied that LinkedIn is currently used to raise the profile of current student leaders, who can go on to share posts which will make them more visible to future employers. She said there is, however, a need to improve training on how to use the platform. She noted that it is, of course, used as a recruitment tool. RH said that one of the new VC's priorities is employability, as it is for HSU as an organisation, and this plays nicely into that theme. She noted it was a platform to use and develop further for HSU. SF highlighted that current students are very much more switched on to employability and thinking about job prospects and self-promotion than previous cohorts.
- CBr congratulated SG on the successful marketing initiatives. She asked if the team were tracking the metric around the gifted Society memberships and whether students were engaging with them. SG replied that this has not yet been reviewed, as it is still early in the Semester. She explained that students are auto-enrolled to a relevant programme, and the team currently relies on information from the HSU's Academic Experience team regarding levels of activity and engagement within the Society. Feedback is largely anecdotal.
- CBr asked about feedback on social media activity and how this informs content. SG replied that she produces a monthly report which breaks down engagement by channel, examining the nuance of popular posts for 'Likes'/'Saves'/'Shares' etc. The team also look at how long students engage with videos and use different tactics to overcome or replicate in the future.
- BW thanked SG for the most interesting briefing.

SG left and RE joined the meeting at 5.20 pm.

10. Academic Experience update

The Board received a review from Rhiannon Ellis (RE), Academic Experience Manager, HSU, on her areas of responsibility. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- MBR asked for clarity on the School Student Forums. RE confirmed that dates had now been set. Actions arising from the Forums will be referred to the PVC Advisory Group for discussion if they cannot be resolved at School level. Where matters are more academic in nature, they will be forwarded to the Programme Academic Experience groups, with outcomes reported back at the next Forum meeting to complete the feedback loop. PD noted that the Forums will include Student Reps, ensuring a wide participation. CBa queried the uncertainty regarding the role of the Forums and suggested that RH and JAh discuss this further offline to ensure clarity. She emphasised that the Forums are intended to resolve issues at School level wherever possible. Where escalation is necessary, this will indicate that university-wide intervention is required. She added that no student should feel that their concerns are distant or disconnected from resolution. JAh said that he would be discussing the Forums with the Officer team at this week's regular meeting. CBa thanked him and noted that the Forums are such an important way of strengthening the student voice. She said it was crucial not to lose any traction on a project that is being built with good intention and impact.
- BW thanked RE for her useful and insightful presentation.

RE left the meeting at 5.35 pm.

Signed Dated

11. Health, Safety and Wellbeing update

The Board received a presentation from SF on Health, Safety and Wellbeing. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- UM asked if SF saw incidents, particularly at the Forum, increasing, given that there seems to be a trend for students to be more 'outgoing' and sociable than in recent years, and what form reporting would continue to take. SF replied that he will update Trustees at every meeting. He explained that incidents are acted upon promptly by the team on duty who produce an end-of-night report with context. He highlighted that the Security team offer excellent safeguarding support, walking students back to Halls or calling a taxi if necessary to ensure safety. Moreover, every week a thorough review is undertaken by the Security team and the Dean of Students' office, who will undertake disciplinary procedures if students have acted inappropriately. RH noted that incident reports also make welfare support recommendations which are always followed up by the Dean of Students' office.
- FM asked about the reports of unacceptable behaviour towards HSU staff by students at the deHav campus. SF explained that these incidents typically involve annoying, inappropriate or harassing behaviours. While not frequent, a trend has been spotted of such incidents occurring more often. Where this does happen, these cases are reviewed with UH and, where necessary, CCTV footage is reviewed. However, SF noted that there have been no reports this year so far. He added that the location of the HSU office is within an area that can become very heavily populated by students at certain times, with some students showing overfamiliar or overconfident behaviour at these times. HSU staff always now work at the deHav office in groups of three to ensure safety and support.

12. Board Effectiveness review

The Board received a paper and presentation on an upcoming Board effectiveness review.

RH outlined that the rationale is threefold: as a charity, HSU has a responsibility to ensure that its Board is working effectively and in the best interests of students; reviewing how the Board is performing is an important part of good governance; and supporting Trustees in reflecting on how the Board achieves and fulfils HSU's charitable objectives. To guide this process, HSU will use the Charity Governance Code, which is recognised as the leading benchmark for trusteeship in the UK. This well-established framework highlights areas to be examined as part of any review: organisational purpose, leadership, integrity, decision-making/risk/control, effectiveness, EDI, openness/accountability. A series of thought-provoking questions and statements in the code underpin these areas.

The review will be conducted through a consultation-based approach ie structured discussions between the Chair and the CEO with small groups of Trustees to gather views, followed by reflection and recommendations. Early findings will be presented to Trustees at the February 2026 Board Meeting with a final report and action plan presented at the April 2026 Board Meeting.

RH noted that it had not been possible to undertake such a review more recently due to the rotating directorships of the Officer Trustees and turnover in Elected Trustee membership.

BW said that he had been through this process before and that the Code offers a very comprehensive approach. He said it was important to use the framework to drive meaningful conversations.

CBr asked if the review will benchmark with others in the sector. RH replied that the process will benchmark against the Code itself which is an exemplar of best practice.

The Board agreed the proposed approach and welcomed the review process.

13. AOB

HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information.

Other

LP reported that all Trustees, as company directors, will soon be required to self-register and log on to the Companies House website to verify their identity in order to prevent fraud and 'silent directorships' and to increase transparency and accountability. This comes into force on 18th November 2025. LP will be advising on the process via email. Before that however, she will ask one Trustee to run through the process with her on a Teams call to clarify her instructions. She noted that advice highlights that it is easier to undertake via the app than online.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 13th November 2025 – TEAMS ONLY
Dates for 2025/26 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Thursday, 19th February 2026
Thursday, 16th April 2026
Thursday, 14th May 2026